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A SOLDIER'S EXPERIENCE.

Life of William B. Lighton. 18mo. pp. 228. Concord, N. H. 1836.

The writer of this narrative is the hero of his own tale. Born in 1805, near Boston, in England, and treated on account of his wayward conduct, with coldness and severity by his parents, he resolved, after wandering for some time in want and distress, to seek refuge in the army, and succeeded, after four or five unsuccessful efforts, in enlisting at the age of fifteen into a regiment then stationed in Canada. He went first to the Isle of Wight; thence he soon came across the ocean to join his regiment in Montreal; and, after five years of crime and suffering, after being sentenced to death for stealing an officer's horse to facilitate his escape from the army, and being confined, as a commutation of punishment, in the prison at Quebec, he fled from prison to this country in 1825. While a prisoner, he had become hopefully pious; and it seems that he had, at the date of this publication, been for several years a local Methodist preacher in New Hampshire.

We cannot commend this book for the elegance of its style, or the variety and value of its matter; but, as it details a few years of a soldier's life, we are glad to lay it under contribution to our cause. He tells us he enlisted "from absolute necessity," and adds, that "vast numbers of the honest, industrious poor in England, driven to destitution through the scarcity of labor, and the oppression of government, enlisted in the army and navy as a refuge from their impending miseries. The prime cause was the general distress prevalent among the laboring class; and very many of the most respectable of the poor were from imperious necessity driven into the army as an asylum from threatened starvation."

PROCUREMENT OF SOLDIERS.—Mark the least exceptionable mode of procuring soldiers. "The sergeant, before enlisting me, took me to the standard; and, after many a flaming description of the pleasures of a soldier's life, I eagerly seized the opportunity, and enlisted for life. The reasons are obvious. I was an inexperienced boy; I was courted by flatterers who seduced me by their bewitching descriptions of a soldier's life; I had alienated my parents too much to think of returning home; I was in utter destitution and misery."

MORAL CHARACTER OF WARRIORS.—Here are the fit materials for an army or a navy; and it is very common in England, if not through Christendom, to release criminals from the prisons, and even from the gallows, on condition of their entering the service.

"While in prison at Quebec, a ship of the line arrived in the harbor, the officers of which visited the prison for the purpose of obtaining some able-bodied men to go on board for the service. The keepers of the prison admitted us all into their presence, when they asked us if we were willing to volunteer to go on board a man-of-war, to which we all answered in the affirmative. They then proceeded to take down our names, &c., telling us they should send for us in a few days."

DISAPPOINTMENT OF NEW RECRUITS, AND THE ORDINARY TREATMENT OF SOLDIERS.—"The hour of embarkation at length arrived, and after a few hours' pleasant sail we landed at Cowes, in the Isle of Wight, and proceeded on our march to the garrison, near Newport, at which place we arrived late in the evening. On the day following we were inspected by the board of officers for that purpose, and sent to our respective detachments, where we immediately commenced our new profession. And soon I found by painful experience, that a *soldier's life* was far from being so easy and pleasing as I had been taught to believe. I soon found that toil and fatigue were incident to his life; and that the plea of youth and inexperience could not be admitted, nor urged as a ground for exemption from duties which my strength was scarcely sufficient to perform. I shall here enter into a few particulars of my experience, that my readers may form some idea of a British soldier's life.

"Having fully entered upon this career, I was sent to the field to become minutely acquainted with the duties of my station: and notwithstanding my ungracefulness at first, I was soon pronounced '*fit for duty*.' In these schools for military instruction, were employed men of the most tyrannical dispositions, whose unmerciful proceedings begat in their scholars feelings of decided antipathy. The least offence offered to these myrmidons, was resented with the most brutal ferocity, and often in a manner totally repugnant to the discipline of the army; which, though severe in itself, does not countenance acts of tyranny on the part of subalterns. Their conduct towards us, had it been known, would have produced an expulsion. But fear bound our lips, and we submitted ourselves to these tyrannical monsters.

"But our trouble did not end here. We were absolutely deprived of many of the necessities of life. Our daily allowance was but one pound of bread, one pound of meat, a pint of soup, and a pint of tea, with three or four potatoes, per man; which in itself was scarcely sufficient, had it been of good quality and measure. But they dealt out the miserable stuff as choice as if it had been gold. Our bread was composed of the coarsest materials, and such was its adhesive quality, that if a piece was thrown against the wall there it would remain.

"In consequence of this scanty allowance, the young troops became strongly addicted to pilfering, while many, from a principle of honesty, actually endured the pangs of hunger. So great was the distress, that every article of clothing that could possibly be spared was disposed of, to procure the necessities of life. Many of my companions in military adventure, now became anxiously concerned about the future. Some applied to their parents for money to procure their discharge, which many of them obtained.

"A very painful circumstance occurred during our stay in this

place, which made every young soldier lament the step he had taken, and almost to wish he had never been born. A very respectable young man, apparently of sober habits (he was married), was so affected with a sense of the wretchedness into which he had thrown himself, that he wrote to his parents for money to procure his discharge. But, unable to procure the necessary means from them, he adopted a measure, which not even his pungent distress and pressing want could possibly justify. He was roomed with the paymaster sergeant of the regiment, and from him he secretly purloined twenty pounds; a sum sufficient to effect the desired object, which he enclosed in a letter directed to his father. The loss, however, was soon discovered. For in lodging it in the post office, the postmaster having fears respecting it, made inquiry at the source from whence it was missing, and he was accordingly imprisoned, tried by a court martial, convicted, and sentenced to the cruel and ignominious punishment of three hundred lashes.

"During his confinement, driven almost to desperation by his situation, and doubtless while deprived of the right use of his reason, he wrote an instrument with his own blood, in which he swore unhallowed allegiance to the devil, and expressed his intention of joining confederacy with the prince of darkness, thereby to evade the force of his cruel sentence. This instrument was discovered, and presented to the adjutant, who after pondering a moment over its mysterious contents, laconically observed, "If the devil is in him, *we* will *whip* him out." The morning arrived for the execution of the sentence, and preparations were made for its accomplishment. About two thousand troops were marched to the spot, where a square of four men in depth was soon formed. Next arrived the trembling culprit, who was stripped and tied to a triangle, prepared for the purpose. When the order for commanding punishment was given, the general sympathy of the troops was expressed by a universal groan. Every blow which was inflicted, while it lacerated the back of the culprit, pained the heart of every soldier, and many turned aside from beholding the horrid scene. The bleeding criminal cried in loud and piercing accents for pardon, until the oft repeated blows created a deathlike numbness upon the flesh, and he became insensible to pain. At length from loss of blood, which flowed freely from his wounds, he fainted, and was conveyed from the brutal scene to the hospital."

INFLUENCE OF WAR ON THE DOMESTIC RELATIONS.—"Already had orders arrived for a detachment to be sent to the second battalion of the corps, stationed at Halifax, N. S. Previous to the arrival of this order, we were called to witness scenes the most heart-breaking and distressing. Many of the new recruits were married men, whose youthful companions had voluntarily followed them, choosing rather to endure with their beloved husbands the rigors of a military life than to suffer a painful separation, when the commanding officers interfered, and ordered that all the women above a specified number should be forthwith returned to their native homes.

"The day arrived when this order was rigorously executed; when the young and innocent wife was torn from the beloved embrace of her youthful husband, amid sobs and tears the most touching. Even now, methinks I hear the shrill scream of the women, as with

the deepest agony of soul, they took the long, last, affecting farewell. How wild the look of the parent, as with a countenance almost like distraction he gazed upon his blooming offspring, which he loved as his own soul. He must now leave them, not to be well provided for, and taken care of; that would be some alleviation; but the soldier can have no such hope; his wife is poor, her family poor, he leaves them then to extreme poverty and destitution. And the poor broken-hearted mother,—her case is worse, far worse! She leaves her husband,—and in leaving him, she leaves her all on earth, her only stay in life. And is she at ease? Ah no! The thought of joys for ever gone, destroys her peace. She retains a faint emblem of the father, in her child, which only serves to tell he has gone for ever. At last she hears that her protector has gone the way of all the earth, and has left her destitute of every means of support, of every thing calculated to sweeten the bitter cup of life. Without friends or home, these children grow up, left to the *tender mercies* of a wicked world; they become common beggars, doomed to suffer the miseries of an ignorant and wretched life; and too often to end that life upon the gallows.

“The reader may have asked the question to himself, was their no prospect of these horror-stricken husbands and wives being again united? To this it may be replied, not unless they obtain their discharge, and that required a sum they would never be able to pay, on account of their poverty. The attachment of these men appeared to be of the strongest kind, for some of them wilfully maimed themselves, that they might be considered unfit for service. An instance of this kind I will mention. A young man as he was accompanying his wife to Cowes to take his final leave of her, and apparently under deep concern, requested leave to step aside for a moment, which was granted, when secreting himself behind a stone bridge, he resolutely cut his thumb from his hand with a razor which he had prepared for the purpose, and then throwing them both into an adjoining field, he joined the rest of his company. His situation being observed by the officer, he was immediately arrested, and soon after tried by a court martial, and sentenced to be a pioneer in the garrison for life.”

MILITARY PUNISHMENTS.—“We have often been called to witness the punishment of criminals, who, for crimes of different grades were brought forward to receive merited punishment. On these occasions, our humane colonel would turn aside his head and weep, and would generally remit the greatest portion of the unhappy man’s punishment; and, had it not been for the existing law, he would have dispensed in his regiment with that kind of punishment entirely.

“It was our misfortune shortly to lose this humane and valuable officer, he being appointed to a higher station. He was succeeded by a Colonel Andrews, and of a disposition precisely different from his predecessor in every respect; and his conduct when he had assumed the command, seemed as if he had determined to ruin the confidence, and destroy the happiness of the regiment. He commenced by driving the troops, both old and young, into the field for exercise; a measure entirely useless, and highly offensive to the old troops, as they had not been used for many years to such treatment. They grumbled and complained loudly, at being thus hammered

and drilled about in the fundamental principles of their duty, which they all perfectly understood. The harshness of our new colonel, and the severe punishments he inflicted for minor and trivial offences, caused many of the soldiers to desert; some of whom were unfortunate enough to be taken prisoners. They were tried by court martials, and sentenced to seven hundred lashes.

"Whenever a soldier was found guilty of a crime and condemned to receive corporeal punishment, he was confined under guard, till the morning specified in his court martial, when he should receive his punishment. The troops were then formed into a square of two deep, and the '*triangle*,' an instrument made for the purpose, was brought and placed, composed of three poles, with a bolt to fasten them together at the upper end, and spread wide enough to fasten the prisoner's legs and hands to two of them: this, with a board that run across to each pole for the prisoner to bear his breast upon, completed the barbarous instrument. Next, the poor criminal, guarded by a file of soldiers and an officer, is conducted to the triangle, where they remain until the adjutant reads his court martial and sentence. After which, the commanding officer gives the word 'proceed to punishment,' when the criminal is stript to his naked back, and tied firmly with cords round his ankles and wrists, to the two spars of the triangle; thus, in a forward, leaning posture, he is stretched ready to receive the application of the whip. The company of musicians, with the drum or bugle-major, take their stand in single file in the rear of the prisoner, as also the surgeon of the regiment, who is there to watch the symptoms of the sufferer, and to relieve him if he thinks he is not able to endure his punishment. The bugle-major then orders the first musician next to him to take his stand at the post of duty, which he does within about one pace of the criminal; and thus, with a *cat of nine tails* in his hand, proceeds, and inflicts the cat at every time the bugle-major counts, which is about once in every four seconds. Thus commences this painful scene. At the end of every twenty-five lashes the executioner is relieved by a fresh hand, who is bound to inflict the the lacerating lash with all his might.

"The following is a description of the whip or cat of nine tails, and the manner in which it is used. The cat itself is composed of nine separate and distinct cords, between an eighth and a quarter of an inch in size, twisted very hard and having on each strand three knots, tied at regular distances near the end; sometimes these have been fixed with wire, to make the punishment more severe and excruciating. The length of these cats are about eighteen inches from the stock, and the stock itself about fifteen inches long. The manner in which it is compelled to be used, is indeed the most surprising and inhuman. The executioner, as he stands, raises his body with a nervous exertion, applies his whip with all his strength, then with a singular whirl, brings it again to his right, ready for the second application. And in case the executioner should be remiss in his duty, the bugle-master alarms him of it, by flogging him on the shoulder with a whip. It will be observed that all the while the executioners are obliged to be stript in their shirt sleeves.

"The effect this kind of punishment had upon its piteous sufferers, is almost too appalling to mention. The first blow usually called

forth his groans. The first twenty-five lashes generally fetched blood; the first hundred would tear the flesh almost to pieces, and before he had received the whole of his punishment, the blood would run copiously down his back into his shoes, flooding the ground. In this situation, with his back mangled as if ravenous dogs had fed upon it, the poor culprit would in vain beg for mercy; sometimes he would fill the air with his groans and howlings, and beg for the remission of half the sentence, exclaiming like Cain, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear.' But no; the cruel appetite of the colonel must be glutted to its full; he would stand unmoved at the painful and bloody spectacle, and sometimes biting his lips (one of his peculiarities), would walk in front of the troops as unconcerned, as if the scene before him was one of the most pleasing nature. But not so with the soldiers, for their hearts were touched with compassion, and many of them fainted and fell to the ground; and others turned their heads from beholding the inhuman spectacle. These punishments were always attended within the barracks-yard, and every entrance to the streets closed, to prevent the inhabitants from obtaining a knowledge of what was transpiring. And, indeed, well they might seclude their diabolical deed; for it was too barbarous for humanity to look upon and not weep. It was a punishment as bitter as death!—a punishment which the heathen savages, in comparison with civilized England, would shudder to inflict upon their vilest enemy. After the execution, a wet cloth was thrown on the back of the prisoner, and he was conveyed to the hospital, more dead than alive, to be cured; which would take from a month to six weeks, if he ever recovered at all. Such indeed has been the horrid effects of this punishment, that many have been known to die in receiving it, and others have had their flesh whipped off, so that their bowels have fallen out."

"THE TRIUMPH OF PEACE."

Our President, more than a year ago, visited Dickinson College, Pa.; and we suspect that this beautiful volume, in part an offering on the shrine of peace, should be regarded as an indirect result of his labors there. His hand has been scattering far and wide the seeds of peace; and we already begin to witness the fruits in different parts of our country. The author, from whose preface alone we infer that he was graduated at Dickinson College last year, has chosen to conceal his name; but, if he does not belie the promise of this youthful effort, his name must, sooner or later, be known. A fine spirit pervades the whole volume; and from the principal poem, delivered at the time of his receiving his first degree, and unanimously requested by his classmates for the press, we quote a few specimens.

"Though bards of eld and modern times,
 Warmed with poetic fire,
 Have strung the chords, and swept the strings,
 Of many a 'living lyre,'